GSA Spent $1 Million at Nixon Homes

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The federal government has paid at least $1.3 million for improvements to President Nixon's home in California and to his home and support offices in Florida, the agency that made the improvements said yesterday.

Richard Q. Vawter, a spokesman for the General Services Administration, which maintains government buildings and purchases government supplies, said the GSA has never before paid for improvements to a President's personal property. He said he did not know whether other government agencies had done so.

GSA said a complete audit of its books indicates the agency spent $709,367 on improvements for the San Clemente, Calif., home since it was purchased by Mr. Nixon in 1969.

This contrasts with a figure of $39,525 that the White House claimed a month ago had been put into the property by the government.

A White House spokesman later said the $39,525 figure was not intended to represent the total expenditures because the White House did not know the total.

Nixon purchased the San Clemente property for $1.5 million, which indicates that federal improvements have amounted to nearly half the purchase price. Tax assessments have valued the buildings on the land at about one-sixth of the total value of the estate.

In addition to the GSA expenditures, the President has said he paid about $123,000 for improvements on the property. The White House has de-

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clined to itemize these expenditures.

GSA said yesterday that $579,907 has been spent by the agency on the Key Biscayne complex. In the past, both GSA and the White House have declined to give a complete accounting of these improvements.

GSA said the improvements in Key Biscayne were put into the President's two houses, which he purchasedi n 1968 and 1969 for a total of $252,600, as well as a house leased to GSA by Robert H. Abplanalp, a personal friend of the President.

GSA said the $1.3 million spent on both California and Florida properties does not include operation and maintenance costs that the government has footed.

An additional $600,000 has been spent for these purposes in the Key Biscayne complex, GSA said. A comparable figure for San Clemente has not yet been compiled, the agency added.

GSA said the figures also do not include expenditures by other government agencies on the properties. For example, Vawter of GSA said, considerable communications equipment has been installed at the properties at the expense of the White House or Secret Service.

Vawter said each of the improvements to the properties had been requested by the Secret Service for "security" purposes. He said a breakdown of the expenditures would be provided Friday at GSA offices in San Francisco and Atlanta.

In recent weeks, however, Arthur F. Sampson, administrator of GSA, has confirmed some of the items paid for by his agency at the San Clemente home.

Among the expenditures were $76,000 for landscaping and installation of a sprinkler system; $184,174 for electrical work; $2,400 for septic tank repairs; $6,400 for a beach cabana and bridge leading to the ocean; $3,090 for roof repairs; $10,612 for roadways and parking lots; $3,360 for an addition to a storage shed; $2,800 for a swimming pool heater; $42,500 for a wall, and $13,500 for three new furnaces.

Other federal expenditures included $12,964 for a bullet-proof screen around the swimming pool; $22,000 for guard houses; $11,561 for a redwood fence, and $13,732 for wall repairs.

Calls to inquire about the relationship of some of these improvements to security were not returned yesterday by the White House press office.

According to Carl H. Davis, the San Clemente building inspector who approved the construction permits for most of the improvements, many of the changes were made because of the dilapidated condition of the house when Mr. Nixon bought it.

Davis said the previous owners were elderly women who could not keep the house in good repair. "There were mice running around," he told this reporter.

The previous gas furnaces in the house simply would not work, he said. "They were antiquated and corroded and probably hadn't been used for years," he said.

The government spent $13,500 for new gas furnaces.

Davis also said the electrical wiring was inadequate to handle the dishwasher, washing machine, trash masher, and other appliances that the President installed in the house.

He said such wiring is common in homes similar to Mr. Nixon's property in San Clemente.

To accommodate the extra power load, the capacity of the electrical system was increased from 60 to 160 amperes, Davis said.

While the previous electrical line leading from the main supply to the house was above ground, the new feeder line installed by the government was placed below ground, Davis said.

A connection to the city sewer system, which the federal government installed for $9,000, was needed because the house previously had only a septic tank, Davis added.

As recently as last October, White House officials were saying that Mr. Nixon bought only 5.9 acres of the 24.6-acre San Clemente tract, that the price was $340,000, that he paid $100,000 down, and that he is still looking for a buyer for the rest of the property.

But last month, the White House said Mr. Nixon purchased the entire tract for $1.5 million, that he paid $400,000 down, and that he sold the remaining part of the property to Abplanalp in 1970 —more than two years before the White House said a buyer had not been found.

The White House has consistently refused to explain the seemingly irreconcilable discrepancies or to make available records that would substantiate either of the President's versions of his purchase of the San Clemente estate.

During Lyndon B. Johnson's presidency, questions were raised by newsmen as to whether the government had borne part of the cost of construction of an airstrip on Mr. Johnson's Texas ranch. Spokesmen for Mr. Johnson on several occasions insisted the Johnson family had paid the entire cost for the airport and additions to it.